23-CR-29

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF WYOMING

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Case No. 23-CR-29

Plaintiff,

Vol. I

VS.

Casper, Wyoming

November 27, 2023 a.m.

11:16 a.m.

TUCKER DONALD WIRFEL,

Defendant.

TRANSCRIPT OF SENTENCING PROCEEDINGS

BEFORE THE HONORABLE SCOTT W. SKAVDAHL UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

APPEARANCES:

For the Plaintiff: TIMOTHY J. FORWOOD

United States Attorney's Office

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Cheyenne, Wyoming 82001

For the Defendant: TRACY HUCKE

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(Proceedings commenced at 11:16 a.m., November 27, 2023.)

THE COURT: Court is in session in the matter of United States of America versus Tucker Wirfel, Criminal Case No. 23-CR-029. I note the presence of Mr. Wirfel and his counsel, Ms. Hucke, and counsel for the United States, Mr. Forwood.

The matter is before the Court for purposes of sentencing. And before we begin that process, are there any preliminary matters or issues we need to address, Mr. Forwood?

MR. FORWOOD: Your Honor, I think the main issue would be in reference to the United States' Sentencing Memorandum, ECF 129, discussing the defendant's acceptance of responsibility, the plea agreement, matters along those lines.

As the Court is aware, the defendant's release was revoked just a couple of weeks ago. In communications with Ms. Hucke, the defendant will not object to the removal of his acceptance of responsibility levels that were taken off. As outlined by the United States in our Sentencing Memorandum, I believe this now results in a guideline range of 92 to 115 months.

I spoke with Ms. Harris earlier last week. She and I both agreed that did not seem like something that the PSR needed to be updated to reflect, but it is something that I think probably we just need to bring to the Court's attention to discuss here in the beginning. Thanks.

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              THE COURT: All right. Thank you.
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              Ms. Hucke?
              MS. HUCKE: And, Your Honor, I think the only
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     additional matter we would like to discuss would be -- will
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     require to seal the record. So whenever the Court would feel
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     that would be appropriate, we would ask to do that at some
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     point during the hearing.
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              THE COURT: Let's go ahead -- I don't see anyone in
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     the courtroom that is needing to be excluded, so let's go
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     ahead and seal the record now, and I'll hear from you on those
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    matters.
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         (Sealed proceedings contained in Vol. Ia, pages 4 through
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     8.)
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23-CR-29 Vol. I - 9 THE COURT: Let me verify timely receipt and review 1 2 of the presentence report with the defendant, Ms. Hucke? 3 MS. HUCKE: Yes, Your Honor. 4 And we had submitted an objection to the amount that 5 was readily provable, which Ms. Harris did reject. And at 6 this point, I don't think it's really worth putting on an 7 evidentiary hearing. It doesn't change the guideline 8 calculation, so we're not wanting to pursue that at this time. 9 THE COURT: All right. 10 I would note, for purposes of the record, that that 11 objection was to, I believe, 24 grams of fentanyl -- let 12 me -- maybe it was 28. But in any event, as noted in her 13 response to the objection, that does not change the baseline 14 under the advisory guideline calculation. 15 So it does not appear to be material in that sense, 16 but I would note that that was there. 17 All right. Let me verify with you, Mr. Wirfel, that 18 you've had the opportunity to review your presentence report 19 with your attorney? 20 THE DEFENDANT: Yes, I did, Your Honor. 21 THE COURT: All right. And she was able to answer 22 any questions you may have had regarding its contents? 23 THE DEFENDANT: She did, sir. 24 THE COURT: All right. 25 I would advise the parties I have not reviewed nor

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considered any other information or material other than that contained in the presentence report and the sentencing statements submitted by the parties.

I would also note that the Court did receive a letter that was filed today, Exhibit D to the additional materials to the original sentencing statement. That letter was submitted by a significant other.

With that, based upon the defendant's statement regarding the objection and the withdrawal of that objection given its lack of materiality, which the Court would agree -- it's actually 25 grams, and that's identified in the addendum. So I would note it does not appear that there are any factual or legal issues impacting the advisory guideline calculation.

That calculation is a little different than one that was submitted due to the issue as noted by Mr. Forwood and acknowledged by Ms. Hucke. That change results in a couple of modifications that need to be made under paragraphs 22 and 23. Based upon the conduct and the circumstances as noted by the United States, those two levels as set forth in 22 and the one-level reduction as set forth in 23 would be removed from the presentence report calculation.

That would result in a net advisory guideline sentencing calculation of 24 -- total offense level of 24 as opposed to 21 under paragraph 24.

And that would also result in a change to the

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     calculation.
                   Ultimately, we would be looking at a total
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     offense level of 24, a Criminal History Category V, which
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     establishes an advisory guideline sentencing range of 92 to
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     115 months; a supervised release period of three years;
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     probation, defendant is ineligible for; a fine range of 15,000
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     to 1 million; community restitution is authorized and
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     recommended in the amount of $500; and there is a $100 special
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     assessment.
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              Ms. Hucke, do you agree as to the guideline
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     calculation and applicable guideline provisions?
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              MS. HUCKE: Yes, Your Honor.
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              THE COURT: And, Mr. Forwood, does the United States
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    agree?
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              MR. FORWOOD: Yes, Your Honor.
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              THE COURT: All right. Let me -- just for purposes
16
    of -- I'll go ahead and seal the record.
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         (Sealed proceedings contained in Vol. Ib, pages 12 through
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     15.)
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23-CR-29 Vol. I - 16 THE COURT: I would turn to the issues of sentencing, 1 2 and I would hear first from the United States, and then I'd 3 hear from the defense. 4 Mr. Forwood. 5 MR. FORWOOD: Thank you, Your Honor. May it please 6 the Court. 7 THE COURT: Counsel. 8 MR. FORWOOD: Counsel. 9 Your Honor, I won't berate too much of what is 10 already filed within the United States' Sentencing Memorandum. 11 What I will say is that this is a very unique situation that I 12 have not yet faced as a federal prosecutor of an individual 13 who received a large amount of controlled substance and was 14 given two very real opportunities to help himself, help law 15 enforcement, help his community, and squandered it away so 16 horribly. 17 And of note, Your Honor, in the United States' 18 Sentencing Memorandum, I would note to page 6. The concern is 19 that it's more than just a relapse. The first message on 20 page 6 is from him to the other individual, stating, "I have

like six people up here just waiting on me to get more that have cash."

The defendant was doing more than just supplying his habit that he relapsed on.

Further, we go down to page 10 through 11, and

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there's a chain of messages there in which it appears that the person he is communicating with that he was acquiring fentanyl from is now acquiring it from the defendant.

One of the hard things with fentanyl, as the Court has been seeing as we get more and more of these cases, is that there are usually a number of different dealers that a person uses. This information we have was incredibly lucky that we just got from this person, Dusty Harris, who was pulled over, found with fentanyl, and we were able to see his phone and see these messages.

I don't know if there's other people he was communicating with. I can tell you, Your Honor, that we have acquired his phone, done a search warrant. Due to encryption purposes, we are not optimistic that we will get any useful information from the phone. So it might be limited to this; it might be a lot more. The United States does not know.

But what we do know is that we have a person with a criminal history, Your Honor, that involves -- let me get to it here -- aggravated burglary from 2013; possession of controlled substances quite often in the teens, importantly of which he was still on probation, looks like. I thought some of this was when he was still on -- I don't know.

But we have a prior felon. We have a prior person who has a long history of controlled substances who was given a number of opportunities and keeps failing, Your Honor.

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And the fact that he continued to sell drugs afterwards shows that him losing the acceptance of responsibility is incredibly important, Your Honor. And a guideline sentence, Your Honor, is incredibly important, because fentanyl is nothing to be messed around with. Defying the Court's orders are nothing to be messed around with.

So the United States does believe that a sentence -we will ask for a sentence at the low end of the guideline,
Your Honor, because he is pleading guilty. But we do believe
that a -- but we do believe that a guideline sentence is
appropriate. Thank you.

THE COURT: Thank you.

Ms. Hucke, if you and Mr. Wirfel would come to the podium.

MS. HUCKE: Thank you. May it please the Court.

THE COURT: Counsel.

MS. HUCKE: Counsel.

So I know that the Court has had the opportunity to read the sentencing memo, and Mr. Wirfel does come before the Court asking for a sentence of 57 months. And most importantly, Your Honor, I think -- I know that Mr. Wirfel has prepared a statement and wants to address the Court and take responsibility for his behavior. But most importantly, it's abundantly obvious that he's dealing with an extreme addiction. And it's not through choice that he has fallen

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into this predicament.

Studies show that when someone is addicted, especially to an opioid and fentanyl, that it does change your brain chemistry. He did well in treatment. He wants to continue his treatment. But he found himself -- when he was taken off of the Suboxone, really, the choice that was made at that point not to fully reach out to all of his supports but to turn to his old behavior and his old lifestyle was really -- that's the bad choice he made, and he knows that.

But in that moment, because his addiction was so severe and he was getting sick, he wasn't thinking clearly. And I'll let him explain this better. And, really, quite frankly, it's because when he's dealing with this level of addiction, he has suffered a form of brain damage, and his brain needs to heal.

Moving forward, Mr. Wirfel thinks it's appropriate that he be in custody for an extended period of time. He's aware that there are drugs in prison, and he's going to do everything in his power to stay away from that so that he can remain sober and be clean. And he wants to do the RDAP program, which I think, at this point, he will be eligible for.

I know, often, when people have successfully completed treatment, BOP has said that they're not eligible for RDAP. But in light of this humongous relapse that he had,

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he's hoping that he will then be eligible for the RDAP program, which has been shown to be a really good program. I think, first of all, when people are committed to that and they've been sober and taken out of any situation where they can obtain fentanyl, they are in a better place to really be in that, to absorb that counseling and that treatment. And it's a long-term program, which will continue from when he gets out.

Your Honor, I think it's most obvious that this wasn't just a choice that he made other than he was really panicking and fell into this and really felt it was out of his control with his addiction, because relapse is a normal path to recovery. Studies have found that, often, people, when they're -- before they are fully recovered, can have multiple relapses.

And, unfortunately for Mr. Wirfel, he was in a legal position where this relapse and this period of time is really the worst thing that he could have done for himself. And that really shows me that that's not a choice to have all of the benefits from the plea agreement and coming forward and pleading guilty taken away from him, which he understands is his own fault that he's lost those things. He's not blaming the Government for their position.

But that really shows at that time he was not thinking clearly. It's not a choice. He's desperate because

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he's getting sick and felt that the quickest way to help that was to reach out and get the drugs illegally.

Now that he's had some period of sobriety, he really wishes that he had reached out more to Eddie Lobatos, his supervising agent; gone back to his treatment providers; found another Suboxone provider that would have been able to prescribe to him. You know, if he had gone through Eddie, he knows that would have been approved.

But in that moment, he didn't do so. And that really shows that it wasn't a choice and that he still has healing that he needs to do. His brain has not healed from this addiction, and it's going to take a long time for him to heal from this addiction, and he needs more treatment.

As the Court has seen from his PSR, this has been a family issue that he's dealt with. His father dealt with being addicted to pills. He lost his brother to an overdose. He's desperate to continue the path to treatment so that his mother doesn't have to bury another son. And he's hoping that he can get out of prison in time to still spend time with her while she's alive, because she's had so many significant health issues.

And just for the Court to know, I know his mother did want to be present today but wasn't able to get a flight and is not able, because of her medical status, to drive from Cheyenne up to Casper. So she was hoping to be present here

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today.

But, Your Honor, I think he takes -- he understands that he doesn't get the levels off the guidelines, but he does ask the Court to consider a variance because he is here to take responsibility. He's committed to his treatment, and he wants to move forward.

And, unfortunately, this relapse just happened at absolutely the worst time for him legally. That has really affected everything in his life.

He does ask for the Court to consider a designation to -- first to Englewood. It's close to his family members. His sister lives ten minutes away. His mother lives in the Denver Metro area. So -- oh, I'm sorry. His mother lives in Cheyenne. That's right. So it is easier for her to travel to Englewood so that she could visit him, as well as he's wanting to be in that environment so that he can just focus on his programming and treatment and do the RDAP program.

If Englewood is not available, he would ask for Sheridan, Oregon. Although it's far from his family, he's done a lot of significant research on the programming opportunities that they have there as well as just the dynamics of that facility that he thinks that he could be successful. So he does ask the Court to consider one of those and asks for a recommendation first to Englewood and second to Sheridan.

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THE COURT: All right. Thank you, Ms. Hucke.

Mr. Wirfel, you're entitled to speak in allocution of any sentence, and I'd hear from you at this time.

THE DEFENDANT: Thank you, Your Honor.

So I stand before you today a broken man, a man since his early twenties that has been plagued with addiction. I often wonder how I went from a bachelor's degree graduate with his whole life ahead of him to an opiate addict facing a prison sentence. The word "addiction" is the only thing that comes close to an explanation.

I wish I could formulate words that would even begin to bring sense to what living with an opiate addiction is like, but I can't. And that's where I would ask for your understanding.

While I was out on bond, things were going well at first. I completed 90 days in treatment and went home to have my surgery. My surgery went well but the turn of events after did not. Before leaving treatment, I started my medicated-assisted treatment with Suboxone management. I've had great success with this in the past, and I figured that it would be my best shot at sobriety for the future.

I had no idea that when I filled my scripts for my surgery that one of the medications would cause me to be immediately terminated from Cedar Mountain's MAT treatment and cut from my Suboxone treatment dry. This turn of events is

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solely my fault as I had failed to read the rules and regulations clearly.

I reached out to two other Suboxone providers in the area; and, unfortunately, no other people in the area were offering or taking any new clients.

Once I ran out of my Suboxone that I had, I went into withdrawal, and I made one of the worst decisions of my life, and that was a relapse.

I reached out to old ties and affiliations, a decision that I will regret for the rest of my life. It's a decision that not only affects me but my family and my loved ones, for this situation is just as hard on them as it is on myself.

I can say nothing more than I'm powerless over my addiction, and my life has become extremely unmanageable. I buried my brother two years ago because of fentanyl, and the last thing a mother should have to do is bury her only remaining child due to the same thing.

I want nothing more than change, Your Honor. It's very apparent I need continued, long-term treatment, and this is something that I welcome. I will not give up on myself or my family, and I ask that the courts not give up on me, either.

I would like to take this time to take full responsibility for my actions. I know that the decisions that

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I have made solely have brought me in front of you today. I had celebrated three and a half years sober before the relapse that instigated the original case that brought me in front of you. Therefore, I know, with the right tools and support, I can remain sober. I can be a success story, someone whose written pages may be able to help and inspire others that battle with addiction and unwritten pages may tell a success story.

In closing, I want to apologize that I stand before you today under these circumstances. It is my fault alone. When sentencing, I hope that you see before you a man that is driven and desperate for change.

THE COURT: Thank you, Mr. Wirfel.

Well, maybe I just don't get it. Mr. Wirfel, your brother died from the very substance that not only you were addicted to but you were slinging. I don't understand. Certainly, the addiction issue, I get that. But slinging it, selling it, and doing it under the situation and circumstances that you were in?

I thought you told Mr. Lobatos that you were not going to -- not going to fill that script. And now you're telling me that, well, you didn't read the rules. And so now I -- you know, I should have. I know I should have.

But here's the deal: You've got to quit trying to cut the corner, and you've got to look in the mirror and

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acknowledge where the hell you are. You're in a Federal courtroom facing significant charges because you couldn't resist the need to sell. And I -- I get the addiction part, but here's the other part of that: To the extent we want to say the addiction and -- preludes the drug transaction and sale, I haven't seen any studies about that; but, certainly, I know the users that will sell in order to support their own habit.

But here's the psychology I have: If you cannot manage to make the right choices under supervised release or under pretrial release and you continue to engage in substance abuse, problems. If you continue to engage in drug transaction of a poison that kills people, guess what? There's one choice, and it's 3553(a) -- I think (4) or (5), and that is removal of somebody so that they can protect the public. The only way we can protect the public in that situation is, is to incarcerate you.

And this isn't your first rodeo. You've rosined up the rope before. So I certainly have empathy. And your history is such, the addiction is there. But, God damn it, keep it to yourself. Killing people left and right. Your brother died, and that's what I really can't understand.

I mean, certainly, drowning the pains of that situation with your own addiction, okay. But this was not, Well, I need a little hit here. This was a period of days if

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not at least a week engaged in this type of behavior.

And, Mr. Wirfel, you're not dumb. You're very intelligent. Unfortunately, you've used your intelligence for all the wrong things. And the reality is, is that you could be, probably, a great counselor. Maybe you will be. You'll get that opportunity, potentially. But that's the other component of this. It's not a matter that you don't cognitively have the ability to understand. I mean, certainly, the brain chemistry is altered by your addictions, but you have the capacity.

You write eloquently. Now, can you act it? It's going to be up to you. But I do not see -- given the facts and the circumstances, consideration of the 3553(a) factors, the Court finds that a sentence at the low end of the applicable guideline is appropriate, and not only appropriate but necessary. And the Court would find a sentence of 92 months is sufficient but not greater than necessary given the facts and circumstances.

I'll make the recommendations, but the reality is, is Mr. Wirfel has engaged in significant misconduct even subsequent to his impending sentence. And despite the reality of that, his choices to not only consume himself but to continue to spread the poison are terribly disappointing and require a sentence of 92 months.

Pursuant to the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 and

months in the custody of the Bureau of Prisons.

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those factors enumerated under Title 18 Section 3553(a), it is the judgment and sentence of this Court that the defendant,

Tucker Donald Wirfel, is hereby sentenced to a term of 92

Upon release from imprisonment, Mr. Wirfel will be placed on supervised release for three years. And within 72 hours of his release, he shall report in person to the

probation office in the district to which he is released.

While on supervised release, Mr. Wirfel shall comply with the mandatory and standard conditions adopted by this Court as set forth in the general order adopting and setting forth the District of Wyoming's mandatory and standard conditions of supervised release and probation filed July 20, 2023, and referenced in the Presentence Investigation Report.

In accordance with those factors under Section 3553(a), the additional special conditions as detailed in paragraph 92 of the Presentence Investigation Report are added to address the nature and circumstances of the instant offense and the defendant's history -- documented history of substance use, mental health problems, and criminal history.

A search condition is ordered to promote public safety through effective oversight, to enforce other conditions of supervision, and to achieve the desired outcomes of supervision.

As Mr. Wirfel has a pending criminal matter, a

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condition requiring him to resolve any outstanding criminal cases to the best of his ability will ensure his ability to complete objectives of supervision and remain in compliance of supervised release.

In accordance with Section 3583(d), the Court finds these conditions are reasonably related to the deterrence of criminal conduct; the protection of the public from further crimes being committed by Mr. Wirfel; and Mr. Wirfel's educational, vocational, medical, or other correctional needs; and they involve no greater deprivation of liberty than is reasonably necessary for the purposes of deterring criminal activity, protecting the public, and promoting Mr. Wirfel's rehabilitation and are consistent with the pertinent policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.

The Court finds that community restitution is authorized in this case and would impose \$500 in community restitution: 325 to be paid to the Wyoming Division of Victim Services, because the statute makes me do that; and 175 paid to the Wyoming Department of Behavioral Health, Substance Abuse Division.

The Court finds that Mr. Wirfel does not have the ability to pay a fine within the guideline range in addition to community restitution, so no fine will be imposed.

It is further ordered that Mr. Wirfel shall pay a special assessment fee in the amount of \$100, which shall be

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due immediately, and payments of that obligation shall be made to the Clerk of the District Court for the District of Wyoming.

He shall participate in the Inmate Financial Responsibility Program to pay his monetary obligations, which are due immediately, and, while incarcerated, make payments of at least \$25 per quarter. Any amounts remaining unpaid shall be paid commencing 60 days from his release in monthly payments of not less than 10 percent of his gross monthly income.

The Court would emphatically and strongly urge that he be allowed to participate in the Residential Drug Abuse Program as such participation is absolutely critical to his successful rehabilitation.

The Court would further -- given the changes, I won't enforce the waiver of the right to appeal given that we're operating in a situation that, arguably, the plea agreement is no longer binding and in force.

So, Mr. Wirfel, I would also -- before I go there, I would recommend him for consideration in Englewood, Colorado.

And if not in Englewood, Colorado, I would recommend Sheridan,

Oregon, because it appears to have the types of vocational and treatment programs that would be beneficial to him.

Mr. Wirfel, you will have 14 days from the date of entry of judgment and sentence in this matter to file a notice

23-CR-29 Vol. I - 31 1 of appeal if you wish to challenge the judgment and sentence 2 being imposed upon you today. If you fail to file that notice 3 of appeal or have someone file it on your behalf with the 4 Clerk of Court, you could forever be barred from challenging 5 the judgment and sentence imposed upon you today. 6 Do you understand these rights? THE DEFENDANT: I do, Your Honor. 7 8 THE COURT: If you have any questions regarding them, 9 please speak to Ms. Hucke. Okay? 10 Ms. Hucke, any -- let me see if I can say it. Any 11 objections to the sentence as pronounced? 12 MS. HUCKE: No, Your Honor. 13 THE COURT: Mr. Forwood? 14 No, Your Honor. MR. FORWOOD: 15 THE COURT: I'll impose the sentence as stated. 16 Mr. Wirfel, I challenge you, put your words to 17 action, and don't let your brother's death be just another 18 mark in the road. 19 Good luck. 20 MR. FORWOOD: Your Honor, do we need to do anything 21 with the petition for action on pretrial release? 22 THE COURT: I would -- based upon the Court's 23 sentence imposed in this matter, the Court would find that 24 that petition is moot given the sentence imposed. 25 Thank you. We'll stand in recess.

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          (Proceedings concluded at 11:52 a.m., November 27, 2023.)
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23-CR-29 Vol. I - 33 1 <u>CERTIFICATE</u> 2 I, MEGAN E. STRAWN, Federal Official Court Reporter 3 4 for the United States District Court for the District of 5 Wyoming, a Registered Professional Reporter and Certified 6 Realtime Reporter, do hereby certify that I reported by 7 machine shorthand the proceedings contained herein on the 8 aforementioned subject on the date herein set forth, and that 9 the foregoing 23 pages constitute a full, true, and correct 10 transcript. 11 Dated this 4th day of January 2024. 12 13 14 15 /s/ Megan E. Strawn 16 MEGAN E. STRAWN Registered Professional Reporter 17 Certified Realtime Reporter 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25